



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

Jan. 16, 2014

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Department of Health Highlights the Importance of HPV Vaccination During Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Bismarck, N.D. – January is National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month, and the North Dakota Department of Health is reminding adolescents and adults, ages 11 through 26, about the importance of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine for the prevention of cervical and other cancers, according to Janna Pastir, Vaccines for Children Coordinator with the North Dakota Department of Health.

“HPV is so common that almost everyone will be infected at some point in their lifetime,” said Pastir. Approximately 79 million Americans are currently infected and approximately 14 million people become newly infected each year. Not everyone goes on to develop cancer, but it is estimated that 33,300 HPV-associated cancers occur each year. Almost all cervical cancer is caused by HPV.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends a three-dose series of HPV vaccine for all adolescents 11 to 12 years of age. The vaccine is most effective when given prior to the onset of sexual activity. A recent study has shown that HPV vaccination at the recommended ages does not lead to increased sexual activity.

“As with any vaccine, it is important to be vaccinated prior to exposure to the disease it is designed to prevent,” said Pastir. “We want to encourage parents and those in the recommended vaccination group to discuss this issue with their health-care provider.”

HPV vaccine has been shown to be very effective and very safe. Like other shots, most side effects are mild, primarily pain or redness in the arm. This should go away quickly, and HPV vaccine has not been associated with any long-term side effects. Since 2006, about 57 million doses of HPV

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vaccine have been distributed in the U.S., and in the years of HPV vaccine safety studies and monitoring, no serious safety concerns have been identified.

North Dakota participates in the Vaccines For Children (VFC) federal entitlement program, which provides free vaccine for children 18 years of age and younger who are American Indian, Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, or underinsured (have insurance but it does not cover vaccinations). Most insurance plans cover HPV vaccine. The North Dakota Immunization Program also has an adult vaccination program that provides HPV vaccines to uninsured or underinsured adults. Please contact your health-care provider or local public health unit for more information about these vaccine programs.

“Forty-one percent of North Dakota girls ages 13 through 17 have been fully vaccinated against HPV,” said Mary Woinarowicz, North Dakota Immunization Information System (NDIIS) Sentinel Site Coordinator. “Although North Dakota’s HPV vaccination rates are above the national average of 33.4 percent, they are well below the Healthy People 2020 goal of 80 percent and vaccination rates for male adolescents remain lower than females. Low vaccination rates are concerning, as unvaccinated North Dakotans are not protected against this serious disease, which causes cancer.”

For more information about the HPV vaccine, contact the North Dakota Department of Health immunization program at 701.328.3386 or toll-free at 800.472.2180.

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